



SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Superintendent

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TESTIMONY in **SUPPORT** of **SB 1081**

An Act Concerning the Use of a Global Positioning System on a School Bus
and the Shortage of School Bus Drivers

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2023

Good morning Honorable Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Transportation Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Senate Bill 1081. My name is Timothy Van Tassel. I have had the honor and privilege of serving as a Superintendent of Schools for the past eight years, and I am currently serving as the Superintendent of the Suffield Public Schools.

I would like it included in the record that I strongly support the intent of

SENATE BILL 1081 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF A GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM ON A SCHOOL BUS AND THE SHORTAGE OF SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS

and the proposed language amendments set forth therein.

While there are several recommended changes being made to improve CGS 14-296aa, I am submitting this testimony due to the specific proposed inclusions of language surrounding:

- **Prioritizing the scheduling of bus driver road tests needed for public passenger endorsements, and;**
- **Studying and making recommendations regarding policies or initiatives to respond to the nation-wide shortage of bus drivers.**

As a current superintendent, I have first-hand knowledge of the issues we are facing with hiring and licensing excellent school bus drivers across the State. This year, it has been an extreme challenge to provide our families with school transportation as required by law. Due to the existing driver

shortage, our district has been limited to 14 school busses on a two-tiered system. This is significantly less than the 18 school busses that we anticipated operating this year. As a result, many of our busses are at maximum capacity with very little space for our students to sit comfortably and safely. The increase of students per bus has also lengthened bus route times, with students needing to wake up earlier and arrive home much later in the afternoon. The driver shortage has also limited our access to evening drivers for athletic and student activities, and we are now depending on families and students to drive themselves in order to participate. This has been an additional burden on our families, and it has placed further exposure on our school district in terms of liability. A final concern to note is that we have no backup drivers as we once did. When a driver is absent, we are left with two choices – divide the route among other busses or cancel the bus run for the day. Due to issues of timing and already full busses, it is not always possible to divide the route; therefore, families have periodically received early morning notifications informing them that their bus would not be running and they would need to provide transport their children to and from school. We are tiring out our drivers, frustrating our families, and are growing more and more concerned with whether or not we will have the drivers necessary to fulfill our obligation of providing transportation to our students and families.

As we all recognize, our bus drivers are essential and vital to our school district operations. Each and every day, our families depend on them to safely transport their children to and from school. Each and every day, our district depends on our drivers to ensure that our children will be able to attend school, arrive on time, and get back and forth between home and school safely and without issue. We are at crossroads, and it is so important that our legislators do whatever is in their power to support our efforts to maintain public school transportation. Prioritizing school bus driver tests by the Department of Motor Vehicles and commissioning a study that will focus on driver recruitment and retention are two very tangible ways that show your commitment to keep our busses in motion, as well as, addressing the bus driver shortage that we are facing.

Our school districts and transportation companies need your support, and we thank you for putting together this bill as a call to action.

Respectfully Submitted,

Timothy M. Van Tasel, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools